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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000296

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, EAP/PIMBS
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: ASEAN AMBASSADORS RESPOND TO RAZALI CLAIMS

REF: A. STATE 36025

[B](#). RANGOON 0266

[C](#). 04 KUALA LUMPUR 4670

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Chief of Mission (COM) met separately with the Singaporean, Indonesian, and Malaysian ambassadors in Rangoon to hear their views on Burma's ASEAN chairmanship in 2006. They dismissed the idea that their governments were prepared to be more activist on the issue of the Burmese assuming the chair. Based on the comments of all three ambassadors, UNSYG Special Envoy Razali seems overly optimistic in suggesting that any of their countries will do more than "quietly remind" the Burmese of the need to meet certain international standards and actually propose that Burma step aside from the 2006 chairmanship. Regarding Razali's continued role in Burma, the Malaysian ambassador was pessimistic, predicting that the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) would under no circumstances allow the Special Envoy (who has been shut out of the country since March 2004) to return until after the referendum on the new Constitution. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On March 4, the COM met with Singaporean ambassador Thambynathan Jasudasen to hear his views regarding Burma assuming the ASEAN chairmanship in July 2006 and hosting the ASEAN Summit o/a December 2006. When asked if he thought that there was any possibility that Singapore might suggest to the Burmese to step aside and pass the chairmanship to another country (Ref A), Jasudasen responded "If we asked that, the problem is then where do you stop?" He said that if Burma was asked to step aside because of human rights issues "then what about Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam?"

[1](#)3. (C) Jasudasen said there were only a few ASEAN members with the "weight" to ask Burma to step aside. In his view, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, or the Philippines "have the weight - Singapore doesn't have the weight." He said Thailand has too many difficult bilateral issues with Burma, Indonesia is too concerned with domestic issues in the wake of the tsunami, Malaysia is unwilling, leaving only the Philippines. (FYI: the Philippines would be the next country in the succession order after Burma for chairmanship; in 1999 the Philippines took over as host of the 3rd annual ASEAN Informal Summit when Burma relinquished their turn as host of the event. End FYI.) However, he did not believe that the Philippines would make any strong push for ASEAN consensus to have Burma relinquish its turn, despite the blunt advice on democratization that President Arroyo appears to have delivered to Burmese Prime Minister Soe Win during his recent state visit to Manila (see Ref B). The Singaporean summed up the situation by saying that everyone recognized the need for the Burmese government to make changes and that there was a downside to having Burma as ASEAN chair, but the problem was "Who will bell the cat?"

[1](#)4. (C) On March 7th, the COM met with Indonesian ambassador Wyoso Prodjowarsito and with Malaysian ambassador Dato Cheah Sam Kip, on separate occasions, to discuss the same topic. In each case, their reaction to the subject of passing over Burma for the ASEAN chairmanship was similar to that of the Singaporean. Both dismissed the idea that their governments were prepared to be more activist on Burma as regards the chairmanship and noted there had been no such official instructions from their capitals on the matter. Both ambassadors mentioned recent calls by ASEAN parliamentarians (including from Malaysia and Indonesia, Ref C) to deny Burma the ASEAN chair. However, they stressed that these viewpoints were not those of their respective governments. The Malaysian ambassador said he did not think the ASEAN parliamentarians would have much luck getting their anti-SPDC presentation aired at the March 9-11 ASEAN-EU meetings in Jakarta.

[1](#)5. (C) Both ambassadors were explicit about their private frustrations dealing with the Burmese regime. The Malaysian said he "couldn't understand their logic" and blamed the SPDC for the situation it found itself in vis a vis the international community. He said that ASEAN governments, especially his own, found Burma to be "a great embarrassment," but it was not clear how to change the SPDC's

behavior. Direct pressure, both ambassadors agreed, would be counterproductive. The Malaysian asserted that the GOB will "never do anything you ask them to do, even if it's in their interest." He predicted that the policy of "quiet pressure" could continue in hopes the SPDC would take some steps to appease the international community before July 2006. The Indonesian ambassador echoed this, saying it was too difficult for ASEAN leaders to directly criticize Burma, especially as the GOB is increasingly comfortable with the attentions lavished on it by China and, increasingly, India. However, the Indonesian added, he hoped the GOB would be willing to undertake some political reform before July 2006 to avoid the embarrassment of a boycott by the United States and perhaps other western countries. All three ambassadors thought it likely that the Burma situation would be discussed during the upcoming ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Cebu, Philippines at the end of March (none of the three thought it would be a major topic -- perhaps raised tangentially as part of the "regional developments" portion of the agenda).

Comment

16. (C) Given the comments of the Singaporean, Indonesian, and Malaysian ambassadors, UNSYG Special Envoy Razali seems overly optimistic in suggesting that any of those countries will do more than "quietly remind" the Burmese of the need to meet certain international standards and actually propose that Burma step aside from the 2006 chairmanship (Ref A). Regarding Razali's continued role in Burma, the Malaysian ambassador was very pessimistic, saying that it was his "best guess" that the SPDC would under no circumstances allow the Special Envoy (who has been shut out of the country since March 2004) to return until after the referendum on the new Constitution. (Note: the possible date for the referendum is unknown, but it is unlikely to take place before the end of 2005. End note.) End comment.
Martinez